

March 12, 2018: 50th anniversary of the Independence of Mauritius



True independence starts with the non-alignment of the mind



By Acharya Bramdeo

If everyone else is doing it ...I'll do it. If everyone else is saying it ...I'll say it. If everyone else is buying it ...I'll buy it. ...and I'll become everyone else!!!

Consequently I surrender my freedom! ...the freedom to be myself ...to do what I want ...to be where I want ...to think on my own ...to not seek unmerited support from anyone ...to be true to myself ...to listen to my inner voice ...to be self-sufficient ...to make bold decisions on my own and not to second guess myself all times ...to be comfortable traveling alone ...to be ok with walking or sitting alone ...to be financially reliable on myself... etc. **Where is my identity? Lost in becoming everyone else!!** Then and only then, I realise: **Independence really starts with the non-alignment of the mind!**

In 'The Hindu' of January 8, 2018, Preeti Zachariah wrote: "I have too many clothes, shoes, bags and jewels... I use only one third ($\frac{1}{3}$) of the contents of my wardrobe... Disorder reigns ... a lot of clothes that I bought that would suit me only if I lose 10 kilos, fashionable things... bought under the spell of 'shopping spree' during which I only slammed money in stores."

In an edition 'The Guardian' of January 2016 Susan More wrote: "The incredible accumulation of things is now considered a symptom of a depressive disorder... miserable mental illnesses that have been converted into pleasure... poor staging... We will all recognize some of these traits in ourselves... our relations with our own goods and our own environment have been distorted... The material world engulfs us."

In an interview in 'le mauricien' of January 05, 2018, the Director of the Consumer Association of Mauritius (ACIM), Mr. Chellum stated, among others: "Consumerism is generating a lot of individualism... Overconsumption, through its impact on the environment, is a locomotive to global warming... An increased responsibility of the individual consumer is instrumental to an all-inclusive approach to change something for our planet... Given the imbalance between those who dominate the market and those who suffer, the government must support sensitisation programs on responsible consumption... We are living more in a *supply-led-society* instead of a *demand-led-society*... The largest companies, often in a monopoly dictate the market and the consumers have no say. The government has a leading role as arbitrator to restore injustices."

No longer free, we live by the diktats of the market. Buying and spending are neither need-based nor for our personal satisfaction. We are consuming only for the sake of consumption. We succumb to the massive tantalizing advertisements. We jump in the flow or paddle in a pond that we have ourselves created. Irrational spending causes an integrated obsolescence, disconnects us from our real needs and cuts us off from realities.

The things we buy often come from the over-exploitation of resources, and often from “the-exploitation-of-man-by-man!” If we want to live life to our taste and to our personal satisfaction, we need to give a pause before going for the ‘shopping frenzy’.

The applications of Aparigraha (Yog) & autonomy of the mind

To free oneself from this frenzy seems to be supernatural or magical. With hindsight, we will realize that we have distanced ourselves from our responsibilities. Independence from this modern form slavery or the craziness of irresponsible consumption begins with a cure or purification at the level of our thoughts.

Aparigraha from Yama-Niyama, the first two stages of Patanjali Yog provides ample guidance: non-voracity, non-possessiveness, disinterestedness, the non-accumulation of unessential things, and more importantly superfluous ideas. It shows the way to offload the needless excess baggage we tediously drag throughout our life.

Education is the only tool to empower people to the judicious use of hard-earned resources. Today’s world revolves around credit, hire-purchase, credit cards, and other financial products promotes the ‘consume-now & pay-later’ lifestyle. Every day we read about people and businesses collapsing under debts. Responsible consumption is about educating our citizens; the know-how will empower us to be more skilful in our expenses. Education is a time taking process and requires strong will from both the learners and the facilitators.

We will be completely different people when we finally come out of this long journey, indeed an uphill race for the victims of consumerism. And, in a short time we would be surprised to realise the stupid things we did when we bypassed the thoughtful use of hard-earned resources and tools, *inter alia*:

- *The craze for fast-food* ...after all our money can provide us with medicines, but it cannot not buy us good health.
- *Branded products* ...we tighten the belt, only to later realize that we lived according to the taste of others or to what others will say, too late to live according to our tastes.
- *Satellite or cable television* ...addiction to screen time, more on zapping mode between the channels, rarely enjoying a specific program; gradually acclimating our mind to instability.
- *Apps on laptops and other IT tools* ...we have devalued our lives with increasing screen time, and shrinking time for truly enriching interactions with the family, relatives and friends.
- *Subscriptions to clubs, etc.* ...more an outwardly social status, unwinding our pockets for something that we seldom use. Morning walks, hiking in nature, etc. are definitely better investments for one's physical, mental / moral / spiritual and social development.

Retrieving the independence of the mind/spirit

It hits really hard when we realise the time and hard-earned money spent on heaps of ridiculous purchases. In fact, if we could add up every cent we spent on items on this list and/or otherwise spend on non-priority things, we could probably pay for a house in cash! *An independent critical*

thinking mind-set is essential if we want to stand firm and focused on real life priorities and not be blown off our feet.

Responsible consumption is aligning our spending habits with our priorities. Yama and Niyama are the Dos and Don'ts within the framework of social and personal discipline. Spirituality (1) lived as spiritual reality on 24x7 basis, i.e. 24 hours a day & 7 days a week, will bring us more happiness and well-being on the physical, moral / mental / spiritual, and social levels. Thus we will regain the independence of the mind/spirit. (1) *Spirituality consists of the living values and often misunderstood as or limited to cult practice.*

Non-alignment of the mind will save us from becoming everybody else and be our own self.

The independence of the mind empowers us to fight against the modern chains or forms of slavery, discrimination and the likes, especially in a world which sees the person only as a tool of production or an object. We shall value first and foremost the human being in us and in others, and work for the well-being of all. True independence starts with the independence of the mind.

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